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THOMAS JONATHAN BURRILL

April 25, 1839 April 14, 1916

In the death of Professor Thomas Jonathan Burrill, the American Microscopical Society has lost one of its charter members whose activity in behalf of the Society may best be judged from his having twice served as its President and at another time as Secretary. A history of forty-four years of active service in one institution—the University of Illinois—where he watched the growth of teaching and investigation in natural science from the time when he was sole instructor in 'natural history and botany' to the time of his introduction of the laboratory method of instruction in his classes in that institution, and finally to the division of his work among four fully equipped independent departments,—all of them the direct outgrowth of his early enthusiasm for science; such is a history that is rarely recorded for any individual.

The first to discover a bacterial cause of disease in plants he opened a broad new field for investigation in bacteriology. His discovery of the cause of pear blight in 1880 assured for him a place as a leader in investigation but circumstances prevented his following this line of work. As one of his closest friends has expressed it "he loved people better than things, education better than science, and others better than himself; and he turned aside into what seemed to him the path of his duty, with no shadow of hesitation or appearance of regret, leaving it to others to note and remember his steady loyalty to his ideal." This turning aside was in response to the constant and growing demands of educational

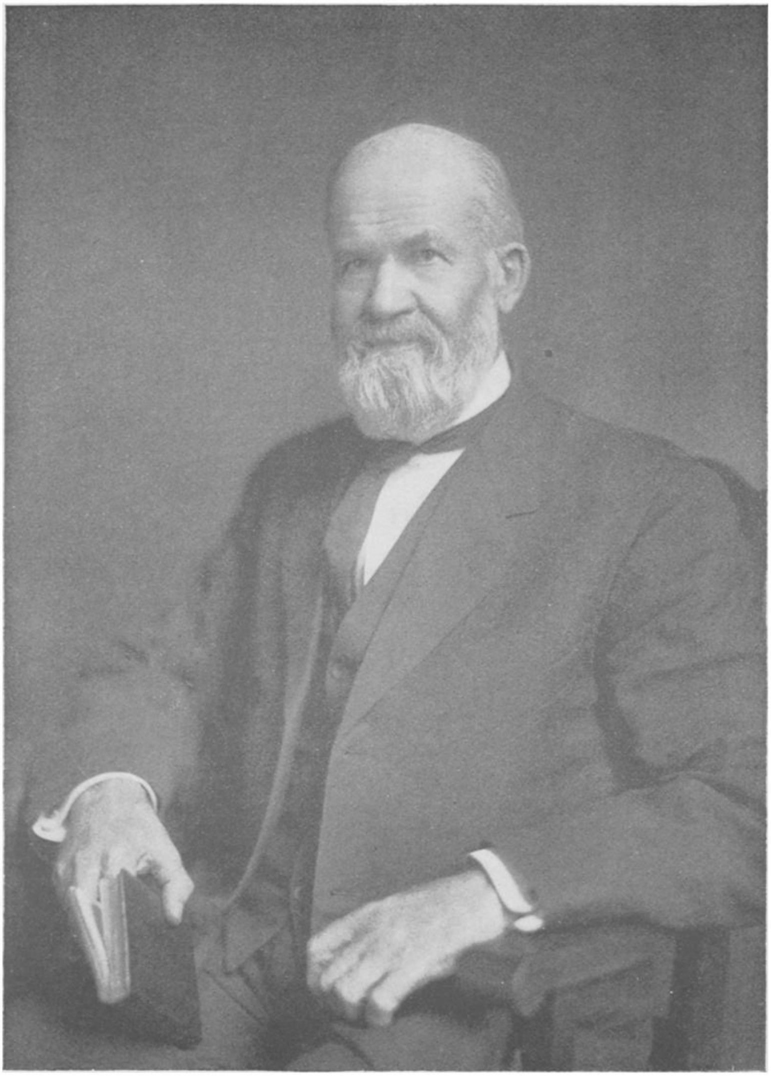

Plate XL

THOMAS JONATHAN BURRILL

and administrative duties which prevented his devoting himself to extended investigations.

Professor Burrill retired from active service to the University in 1912. This same year he was made Professor Emeritus of Botany. His withdrawal from administrative duties gave him time even at his advanced age to begin again upon an active research program. Until within the week of his death he was busily engaged in attempting to induce nitrogen forming bacteria to grow on non-leguminous plants. His interest in modern problems of bacteriology was most fittingly recognized in his election to the Presidency of the American Society of Bacteriologists in December of the year preceding his death.

The development of biological equipment during a single life time is most vividly shown in the collection of microscopes and apparatus used by Professor Burrill and now on exhibition at the University of Illinois. One of his most intimate colleagues has promised an account dealing with his work and his apparatus for an early number of the Transactions.